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Lakeshore East getting school

Private, internationally-focused GEMS Academy coming in 2013

06/20/2012 10:00 PM

By BEN MEYERSON
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Downtown residents are getting a new school in 2013 — an elite program aimed at providing kids with an international education. There's just one catch: It's not public.

It'll be called GEMS World Academy, and it's slated for New Eastside, the area northeast of the Loop between Grant Park and the Chicago River that features the award-winning Aqua as well as the Aon Center. The school will sit on the northwest corner of Lakeshore East Park.

A school has been planned at that location for years, and initial language in planning documents called for it to be public. But after being formally presented with the option in 2002, Chicago Public Schools decided not to bite.

"Based on district-wide building capacity and existing capital improvement needs, it was decided that opening a school in this location was not a priority," CPS spokeswoman Marielle Sainvilus said in an emailed statement.

That opened the door for GEMS, a private school with branches in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, England, Kenya and India, among other locations. The schools focus on providing education with an international focus.

GEMS, which stands for Global Education Management System, is making its U.S. debut this fall with another school in Chicago, a preschool in Lincoln Park called Little GEMS International, at 2301 N. Clark St.

The World Academy in New Eastside will open in two phases: a building for kindergarten through fourth grade is expected to open in fall 2013, and a second building for fifth through 12th graders is expected to open sometime in 2014.

Barbara Jarzyniecki, vice president for administration, said the group was drawn to Lakeshore East because of its prime location.

"We loved the idea of opening a school in Chicago. ... We're extremely excited that's where we are," she said. "I must say, this site was very appealing because it's new and there are many new developments around it. We saw the apartments and rentals going up around it and felt it was the place to be."

Chicago will be GEMS' first World Academy outpost in the U.S., but they're hoping to expand soon to New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington.

At Little GEMS in Lincoln Park, Director of Admissions Nadia Dreger is working on recruiting students for this fall's inaugural preschool class. They're taking kids from infant level to 4-5 years old.

Dreger's not that involved in Lakeshore East's World Academy yet, but she said the GEMS philosophy of teaching starts early.

"Their beginning education process really does begin in infancy," she said. "Our world is getting smaller, so it's really important for our students to understand not just America but the cultures of other countries"

Students enrolled in Little GEMS will also have first priority for seats in the World Academy.

But putting your kids into the GEMS program won't be cheap. Dreger said that for Little GEMS, tuition will range anywhere from \$6,000 to \$25,000 a year, depending on the number of hours and days a child is in the school. Tuition for the World Academy hasn't been settled yet, she said, but it's likely to be more expensive.

GEMS does have another branch of its company that runs charter schools, many already open in the U.S., but the Chicago school will be its first World Academy in America.

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"We want to replicate the schools we have internationally," Jarzyniecki said. "It's a different thing entirely than our charters."

Jarzyniecki deferred questions about the building itself to bKL Architecture, the school's designer, but bKL Principal Thomas Kerwin declined to comment on the project at this time. The location is zoned for buildings as tall as 70 feet, according to the Chicago Architecture Blog.

Jarzyniecki said the company has met with Ald. Brendan Reilly, the Mayor's Office and representatives from Chicago Public Schools.

Reilly did not return calls seeking comment as of press time Wednesday.

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5 Comments - Add Your Comment

By Dave

Posted: 06/26/2012 12:23 PM

Why can't both be done? There has got to be room somewhere else for a public school. It's a shame that area doesn't have a public school.

By S.Uhran from Near East Side

Posted: 06/23/2012 9:01 PM

Just because someone lives in our neighborhood doesn't mean he/she can afford a private school, or want to have children attend such a school. What happened to the plans for a public school? If no public school, then no school.

By Lynn Fess from South Loop

Posted: 06/22/2012 0:24 AM

Agree 100%. If you like this story, check this out. Is CPS and the Alderman going to stick it to the neighborhood by taking away the promised 300 spots in Jones?
<http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20120620/BLOGS02/120629987/south-loop-battles-over-who-will-get-a-new-school>

By N from Lakeshore East

Posted: 06/21/2012 9:44 PM

Excellent comment! I thought the higher taxes we pay for a small condo in a highrise with 400 more of these condos are equivalent to one house in suburbs. Yet we can not get a public school is sad. In the city if you look at the breakdown of the taxes you pay majority goes to schooling but I wonder where now.

By not a parent, but still not happy from Loop

Posted: 06/21/2012 1:31 PM

Isn't this discrimination on the part of CPS? The plans were to build a school there. There is no neighborhood school within a mile of that location. CPS is probably thinking that if people with kids can afford to live there, then they can afford to send their kids to private schools. How arrogant on the part of CPS. Parents are paying, thru taxes, for public schools, yet have nowhere to send their kids. Shame on CPS!

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